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LETTER DATED 8 MARCH 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF UGANDA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you a record of the press conference held on 2 March 1999 by Yoweri Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda, in respect of the horrific acts of primitive savagery in which 12 people, including 8 tourists, were raped and butchered by the murderous gangsters that operate from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see annex). These cold-blooded murderers and their collaborators in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be pursued and denied a hiding place.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Prof. Semakula KIWANUKA
Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative of Uganda
to the United Nations

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Annex

Statement made by the President of Uganda on 2 March 1999

Callous murder of tourists in Bwindi

1. The President expressed his profound sorrow and sadness at what happened in Bwindi on Monday, 1 March 1999. He extended his sincere condolences to the bereaved families and their loved ones on his own behalf and that of his Government. The President also extended the same condolences to the bereaved families of Ugandans who lost their lives during this episode, including the unfortunate officials of the park.

2. The President said the criminals were the Interahamwes, part of the same group that massacred over 1 million Rwandese 5 years ago in Rwanda. They are the ones who came and abducted tourists in Bwindi, people who were not armed, other than the park rangers. There was absolutely no reason to kill the tourists. Even to take them hostage is criminal. At best they could have asked for ransom.

3. Their action proves how we were right in taking firm action about going into Congo. These criminals are not any different from the Kony group. We have now given instructions to the army to pursue them wherever they are.

4. The President admitted that there was a lapse on the part of the Government. He said it was true that originally the national parks were not to be guarded by the army, but given the criminal minds of the gangs in the region, the authorities concerned should have taken precautionary measures and requested the army to guard the area. The President said that he had earlier, on his own intuition, decided to send an army detachment to guard Paraa in Murchison National Park because of the threat of the Kony group. He did this over the objections of the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), which was against stationing elements of the army to guard tourist centres. Similarly and much earlier, he had given instructions that Mweya Lodge in Queen Elizabeth National Park be guarded until such time as there was complete stability in the whole region. In the case of Bwindi, this had not occurred to him, as he had not visited the area. Protection of Bwindi is now included, and national park authorities are being asked to indicate any other areas that should receive protection. It is not impossible to secure security for all such areas.

Questions to the President from the journalists, the majority of whom were foreign correspondents from the British Broadcasting Company, the Cable News Network and Reuters, among others

Question:
Why was the border not guarded despite the presence of Ugandan troops in the Congo?

Answer:
Ugandan troops are in the north-east Congo and not so much in the area where the attack took place. Now we have moved to the area and we shall stay there.

Question:
What is the account of what took place? Could we have some more details?

Answer:
The accounts we have received came mainly from the survivors. The eight tourists were killed in a very brutal way using machetes. Six of the survivors were released for unknown reasons. There is a version of the story that there was an exchange of fire between the rebels and the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF). There was no such thing. UPDF troops met the survivors coming down as UPDF forces were following the trails of the rebels and their abductees. We shall follow them in Congo and kill them.

Question:
How close is the rebel base in the Congo?

Answer:
The rebels have no permanent bases as such. They tend to move up and down the Masisi/Rutsushu areas.

Question:
Why is there so much interest in the killing of the foreigners when other killings of Africans elsewhere are going on unnoticed?

Answer:
I would not say the world is indifferent to African killings. The international community responded promptly to the 1994 massacres in Rwanda. Interest has to do with the flow of information. Where there is information, the international community will show interest.

Question:
Why is Uganda a target?

Answer:
The bandits committed this callous murder to draw international attention. These are people who make a lost of mistakes. They even killed Belgian peacekeepers in Rwanda who were trying to save the Rwandese Prime Minister, who was a lady. They will kill anybody. Time should not be wasted in analysing their motive. The point of fact is that these are criminals who will do anything, including murder.

Question:
What assurances can Uganda give that tourism will be safe again in the future?

Answer:
If the army is not specifically requested they cannot intervene. The army is busy in several areas. It is not an idle army sitting doing nothing in the barracks. The game warden who should have been held responsible for not

alerting or requesting protection is already dead. He was one of those brutally murdered.

Question:
What could have been the motive of the rebels?

Answer:
We still have terrorists who aim at soft targets such as tourists. Their grievance is power but they cannot own up to it and so, given their criminal mind, they aim at soft targets.

Question:
Is Uganda's involvement in the Congo a factor?

Answer:
Why don't they attack UPDF troops in the Congo, why attack the tourists from California, the women and children who have nothing to do with regional politics? This is what distinguishes a terrorist from a freedom fighter. These are terrorists.

Question:
Is it possible this could have been a different, perhaps new, type of rebel group?

Answer:
They told the people that they were Interahamwes. The survivors confirmed the same. No, it is not any other rebel group.

5. The President said that the Interahamwes needed to be pursued by the whole international community. They committed grave crimes in 1994 in Rwanda. Ever since they moved into Congo they have been committing atrocities in that country. Now they have committed premeditated murder without provocation and without any cause. The international community must now act against these murderers.

6. The President regretted again and again the brutal murder of the innocent tourists and the Ugandans who died. He said his Government would do everything possible to make sure this type of incident does not recur. If it had been brought to his attention, he could not have accepted the argument of not deploying the army because it would deter tourists.

7. In conclusion, the President reiterated his deep and sincere condolences to the bereaved families and to their loved ones. This, he said, should not recur.